

CLAIMS:

1. A method for closing an opening extending through
annulus fibrosis into an interior of a spinal disc, the method
5 comprising:

creating an opening through the annulus fibrosis into the
interior of the disc;

performing a procedure within the interior of the disc; and

applying energy to tissue surrounding the opening to
10 substantially close the opening.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of performing a
procedure comprises removing at least a portion of the nucleus
pulposus material from the interior of the spinal disc.

15

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of performing a
procedure comprises introducing an implant within the interior of
the spinal disc.

20 4. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of performing a
procedure comprises introducing a therapeutic agent into the
interior of the spinal disc.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of applying energy comprises applying RF energy.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of performing a
5 procedure comprises introducing a distal portion of an elongate member into the interior of the disc.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein the step of applying energy comprises:

10 disposing an energy element on the distal portion of the elongate member within the opening; and
activating the energy element within the opening.

8. The method of claim 7, further comprising withdrawing
15 the distal portion of the elongate member through the opening while the energy element is activated.

9. The method of claim 6, wherein the step of performing a procedure comprises:

20 inserting a distal end of a needle through tissue to a predetermined location within a patient's body; and

delivering a therapeutic agent through a lumen of the needle to the predetermined location.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein the step of applying energy comprises:

inserting an energy element into the lumen until an electrode on a distal tip of the energy element extends beyond
5 the distal end of the needle; and

delivering electrical energy from a source of electrical energy via the electrode to tissue surrounding the electrode to substantially close the passage.

10 11. The method of claim 10, wherein the step of inserting an elongate element into the lumen comprises connecting a handle member to a proximal end of the needle, the elongate element extending from a distal end of the handle member.

15 12. The method of claim 11, wherein:

the needle comprises an electrically conductive material, and the elongate element comprises an electrically insulated outer surface that extends through the needle; and

the handle member comprises an electrically conductive
20 region that is coupled to the needle when the handle member is connected to the needle, the conductive region being coupled to the source of electrical energy.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein the step of delivering a therapeutic agent comprises injecting the therapeutic agent through the lumen from a syringe connected to the proximal end of the needle.

5

14. The method of claim 13, further comprising disconnecting the syringe from the proximal end of the needle before connecting the handle member to the proximal end.

10